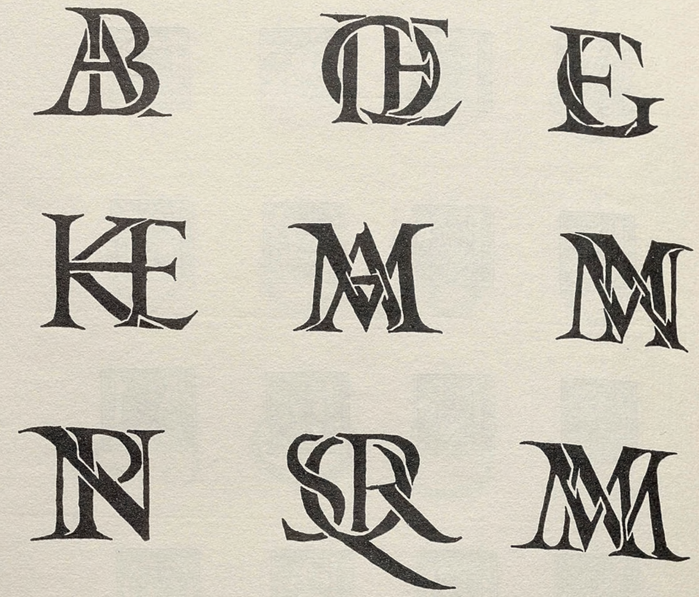

THE method of making ciphers, which are commonly inscribed in gold rings, on tapestry, on glass, in paintings, & in many other ways, to represent the names and surnames of the gentleman and his lady, is to take the first letters of the said names & surnames, & interlace them in a combination which is well adapted to them. For there are letters which accord better with one another than some others; and when such accord is pleasing to the eye, be sure that those divine letters covertly denote some suitable infusion of grace between those whose cipher is thus made. But observe that the best ciphers are of only two letters, or of three or four at most. If there are more it is a wonder if they do accord well; for too many letters together are no more graceful than a bunch of thorns, since some being placed upon others make such confusion that one does not know at all what the letters are. One does not know whether they are letters or thorns or, as they say, a magpie's nest. Make them of as few letters as you can, and model them upon those which I have here made for you.

CIphers can be made also of Greek letters by interlacing them with each other; also one might well make many other different sorts of letters, according as the gentleman or the lady, or both together, might choose. Different persons wish them made in different ways. I find some who arrange them well enough, and these, as I said before, are they who make them of two or three letters. I find others who combine so many letters that there is not one of them which is left entire; and, what is worse, they curtail some of them, mutilate others, and make others one-half too small, which is contrary to the art of all well-made letters. It is well for you to observe that letters are so noble and so divine that they should not be in any wise misshapen, mutilated, or changed from their proper shape. For, as I have said and shown most abundantly in many places of this work of ours, they resemble the human body, in accordance with the proportions of which I have drawn the Attic letters. If one should take away the arm, the leg, or the head of a man, it would no longer be a man, but would rather resemble a stump or the trunk of a tree. So, in like manner, if one mutilates a letter in any way whatsoever, it is no longer a letter, but a counterfeit, or a thing so evil that one could not give it a fitting name, unless he should say that it was a monster. On the other hand, if too many letters are gathered together, they